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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [EG](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAELIS ANGRY ABOUT EGYPTIAN COOPERATION WITH
HAMAS ON GAZA HAJJ PILGRIMS, REJECT TRILATERAL MEETING

REF: A. CAIRO 3400
[1](#)B. CAIRO 3385
[1](#)C. JERUSALEM 2453

Classified By: Political Counselor Marc Sievers, Reason 1.4 (B) (D)

[1](#)1. (S) Summary. MOD and IDF contacts tell us that Egypt cooperated with Hamas in allowing hundreds of Gazan Hajj pilgrims selected by Hamas to cross through the Rafah Crossing this week. MOD Arab Affairs adviser Hacham, who conducts the MOD's day to day contacts with Egyptian General Intelligence, told PolCouns that Hamas is inserting among the pilgrims terrorists who will go to Iran for training. Hacham stressed the importance of a visit to Cairo by Defense Minister Barak, saying that Barak wants to meet Mubarak and EGIS chief Soliman to "put all the issues on the table." Separately, IDF Planning Branch Middle East Policy head Colonel Orion told Army Attache and PolCouns November 30 that MOD/IDF will not agree to attend a trilateral meeting with the U.S. as requested by the Egyptians, but are ready to meet bilaterally with Egypt at any time. The Israelis see Egyptian policy toward Gaza as increasingly based on an assessment that Hamas rule there is irreversible. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (S) MOD Arab Affairs Adviser David Hacham told PolCouns December 4 that the GOI was outraged by what he termed Egypt's decision to give in to Hamas pressure to allow about 700 Gazans to cross through the Rafah terminal December 3 on their way to perform the pilgrimage in Mecca. Hacham, who serves as the MOD's regular contact with Egyptian General Intelligence Service, said that he had protested to EGIS officials in Cairo and at the Egyptian embassy in Tel Aviv, telling them that Israel was not convinced by Egyptian "excuses" that they had no choice but to open the Rafah Crossing or Hamas would blow a hole in the border fence. Hacham added that according to reports he was receiving, Hamas and Egypt had agreed to move a similar number of Hajj pilgrims through Rafah on December 4. Hacham said Israel's concern was that Hamas would use the opening of the crossing to exfiltrate a number of terrorists who would go to Iran or Syria for training. He added that the Israelis confirmed media reports that Saudi Arabia had issued visas for the Hamas-sponsored pilgrims to travel to Mecca.

[1](#)3. (S) Hacham said the Egyptian "deal" with Hamas undermined the Palestinian Authority, which had worked out with Israel a separate arrangement to take about 2,000 Hajj pilgrims through the Erez Crossing and across the West Bank to Amman and onward travel to Mecca. Hacham also complained that Egypt was "slow-rolling" implementation of an Egyptian-Israeli agreement for several hundred elderly and ill Gazans to leave Gaza through the Kerem Shalom Crossing

and into Egypt.

14. (S) Asked how Israel planned to engage the Egyptians on the latest developments, Hacham said the MOD was focused on a proposed visit to Cairo by Minister of Defense Barak. Barak hoped to meet with President Mubarak and EGIS Chief Omar Soliman in order to "lay everything out on the table." Hacham noted that the Egyptians were hesitating, possibly because Barak had turned down an earlier invitation from Mubarak in September. Barak had felt the timing was wrong because of the September 9 Israeli airstrike on a Syrian nuclear facility, but Hacham thought Mubarak may have been offended that Barak declined his invitation. Hacham stressed that the MOD was not currently interested in U.S. mediation with Egypt, saying that the issues needed to be addressed bilaterally at the highest levels. Hacham said Egyptian cooperation with Hamas was making it increasingly likely that the IDF would have to carry out a large-scale ground operation in Gaza, even though Hacham anticipated that such an operation would result in significant casualties and disrupt peace negotiations with the PA.

15. (S) In an earlier conversation about Egypt's urgent request for a trilateral meeting, IDF Planning Branch Head of Middle East Policy Colonel Assaf Orion told Army Attache and PolCouns November 30 that the IDF was suspicious of the way the Egyptians had gone about requesting an urgent trilateral meeting for that day. Orion noted that Egyptian liaison officer Major General Nagy Kamal had only contacted Orion's boss, Brigadier General Yossi Heiman at 4 pm the previous day, hours after the Egyptians had requested the meeting through Embassy Cairo. Orion said Nagy had told Heiman that it was the U.S. side that was requesting the trilateral meeting. Orion commented that Israel would not agree to a trilateral meeting at this point, seeing no point in putting

the U.S. in the middle, but the IDF was ready for a bilateral meeting "any time the Egyptians want to meet." Orion added that Israel and Egypt had already discussed several times Egyptian concern that Hamas might breach the fence in early December in order to force Egypt to allow Hajj pilgrims to depart Gaza, but he insisted that Israel would not agree to Egyptian requests that the Rafah Crossing be opened for this purpose.

16. (S) Comment. The latest Rafah incident has only served to strengthen Israel's conviction that Egypt is directly cooperating with Hamas in Gaza. The Israelis are aware of Hamas pressure on Egypt and Egyptian desire to avoid an embarrassing confrontation with Hamas, but they argue that Egyptian policy is now increasingly based on a decision to treat Hamas rule in Gaza as irreversible, thereby undermining both Israel and the Palestinian Authority. We see little MOD/IDF flexibility at this point regarding a trilateral meeting involving the U.S. Instead, the MOD is focused on a Barak meeting with Mubarak as the way to get all the issues out in the open, perhaps because Prime Minister Olmert reportedly down-played the smuggling and Rafah Crossing issues during Olmert's pre-Annapolis meeting with Mubarak. Olmert may have calculated that Mubarak's support for Annapolis was a higher priority than emphasizing growing Egyptian-Israeli differences over how to handle Gaza, but the MOD remains the GOI lead agency on Gaza.

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